



Yellow Bus, Digital C-Print, 30x40 in.



Blooming, Digital C-Print, 30x40 in.

Following my art has brought me to unexpected places and allowed me to meet some of the most interesting and creative people in the world. I have been living in East Tennessee for the past twenty-five years. For the last seventeen years I have been working in a tractor shed converted into a studio in a rural setting that continues to be an inspiration for my work.

Being invited to Bangladesh to spend a month among artists and a population of the warmest people imaginable was an unsurpassable experience. What I saw and felt there will be with me for the rest of my life. What I experienced, three hundred and sixty degrees around me, drove me to attempt to capture as much as I could by the most expedient means: a camera. Having grown up on the ocean in Rhode Island, water has been a constant theme in my work. It connects us all to each other. In Bangladesh, where the effects of global warming are quite evident, it is an increasingly important element. The places where water meets land are in flux.

Upon returning to Tennessee I spent several months layering my photographed images over each other. For the backgrounds, I chose what I had captured on land in the city. Overlaying them, I chose images of everyday workers and water traffic on the Meghna River. These photographs are, literally, where water meets land. Using a process akin to printmaking techniques, which set down transparent inks in layers, allowed me to combine land and water into a third, dreamlike place.

Andrew Saftel

There is community in art. And Andrew Saftel is a community organizer. In the autumn of 2010, Andrew came to Bangladesh as an American artist in residence, supported by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and sponsored by U.S. Embassy Dhaka where I was serving as Public Affairs Officer and Director of an American Center. As we looked for an arts initiative to engage and inspire some of the 160 million people in diverse, syncretic, and highly artistic Bangladesh, our search led to Andrew, whose work I knew through mutual friends. One narrative that resonates strongly in both Bangladesh and the U.S. is native land or *janmasthan*. Whether conceived and executed in Appalachia, Mexico, or on a boat on the Meghna River in Bangladesh, Andrew's work sings of native land with all of its nostalgia and reverie.



The "Native Land/Janmasthan" project of 2010 was thus born out of Andrew's ability to communicate community and sense of place in his artwork. The works displayed in his many exhibitions and the images in this publication speak to this talent. But what is equally important, and what Andrew is remembered and loved for in Bangladesh, is his gift for creating community through the making and sharing of art. Andrew's lesson is that there is as much beauty, magic, and value in the practice as in the product.

He taught this lesson repeatedly in Bangladesh, where printmaking is a highly esteemed artistic method, practiced by Bengali masters like Zainul Abedin and many contemporary artists. Andrew introduced the very direct process of collagraphy at Atelier 71, an exciting new printmaking workshop in Dhaka, and at the Institute of Fine Arts at Dhaka University. Senior artists like Biren Shome, Shohid Kabir, Kalidas Karmarkar, and talented teachers like Anisuzzaman, Rume, and Rokeya Sultana gathered with students around the press as Andrew demonstrated the making and printing of collaged blocks: rolling paint over applied found objects from his walks in Dhaka—a bit of sari cloth, a playing card, some string. As all of the artists circled in silence around the press, they were unified by their suspense, expectation, and enormous good will. As the prints were pulled, revealing the work underneath, a community of believers in art was also revealed, inspired by Andrew. Give him a moment to invent and you will see the magic—a dusty train platform transforms into a studio for street children; the walls around an urban slum become a canvas; a little boy named Prottoy approaches with an impressive drawing and says "Andy taught me how to do this." Somewhere, as you are reading this, Andrew Saftel is making art and he is building community.

Lauren Lovelace
U.S. Foreign Service Officer

where water meets land

ANDREW SAFTEL

January 12 - July 14, 2013



where water meets land

The Memphis Brooks Museum of Art is proud to partner with Tennessee artist Andrew Saftel on an exhibition of recent work titled *Where Water Meets Land*. Widely exhibited and collected throughout the country, Saftel's art is historically colorful, complex, and rich with underlying narratives. This exhibition speaks to our vision: "Transforming lives through the power of art," as the artist's established aesthetic meets new content, process, and form after an inspiring journey to Bangladesh.

In 2010 Andrew Saftel spent a month in Bangladesh hosting printmaking workshops for adults, working with children, and leading a "floating studio" on the Meghna River with thirty established artists. When I met the artist, he shared his experiences that resulted in this new body of work. "In Dhaka, as I photographed bus sides and other interesting surfaces, I had no idea what I would use them for. I responded to these images since the scrapes on buses are the remnants of an incident in people's lives. I just shot away with my small Leica camera all over the city, making use of being ensnarled in outrageous traffic, thinking of these details as backgrounds or abstract paintings."

Saftel described the two days on the Meghna River as his favorite part of the trip. The artist recalled, "I painted one large watercolor but became so wildly enthusiastic about the wooden fishing boats and fisherman with nets, and the barges, ferries, and all manner of craft on the water that I photographed like a mad man hopping all over the two-decker ferry to capture the moving water world."

After examining hundreds of photographs, Saftel experienced a creative epiphany. "I realized that these river images are the reason I took all of the photographs of buses and surfaces in the city. In my mind I could see the river images layered over the scraped bus sides." Back home, the artist's traditional methods were energized with new experiences, media, and experimentation. He learned to layer the images in Photoshop and the results are magnificently reminiscent of his paintings, collages, and prints. Saftel explained, "These layered images are the result of over thirty years of composing pictures, working with color, and observing the world in order to find content for my work. There is something about these images that satisfies my deepest urge to make something to share with the world. They somehow speak of a specific people and place yet are about all people living through their days."



Row, Walk and Ride, Pencil, Colored Pencil, Oil Pastel, Watercolor, Collage and Found Objects on Paper, 42x70 in.

The collage titled *Row, Walk and Ride* is an important entry point into the exhibition. It is the first piece Saftel created after returning home and it represents where he has been both literally and aesthetically. The artwork includes found objects from the trip and serves as a transition point between his earlier and more recent work.

Photographs of the Meghna River layered with details of Dhaka city public transit buses create a complex relationship between the country's natural and urban landscapes. Vivid colors, interesting lines, and busy text contrast with the horizontal serenity of the river. The photographs challenge viewers to make sense of an alternate reality and leave more questions than answers. They represent a culmination of Saftel's experience as an artist and as a human being.

Jenny Hornby
Assistant Curator of Education
Memphis Brooks Museum of Art

Bright Boy, Digital C-Print, 30x40 in.

